DARK HORSE MANGA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
105
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DUET
ONE SHOT
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*. seeks Anotsu's death

HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful, manipulative Mugai-*ryū* leader and *bangashira* serving the Shogun

ANOTSU
The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Habaki Kagimura orchestrates a surprise attack at a lavish banquet that decimates a batch of new Ittō-*ryū* recruits. With ten core followers still alive, Anotsu rallies his surviving warriors together to dish out vengeance and rededicate themselves to his ideals. After sparring with Gichi, Manji agrees to meet with the mysterious Kagimura at a *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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無限の住人

DUET

YOU'RE OKAY WITH THIS, KAGEHISA?

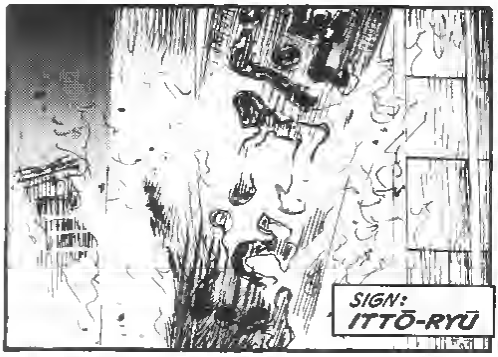
IT'S TIME, NOW...
I AM.

NO DISTRACTIONS.
...FOR US TO RETURN TO OUR ROOTS.

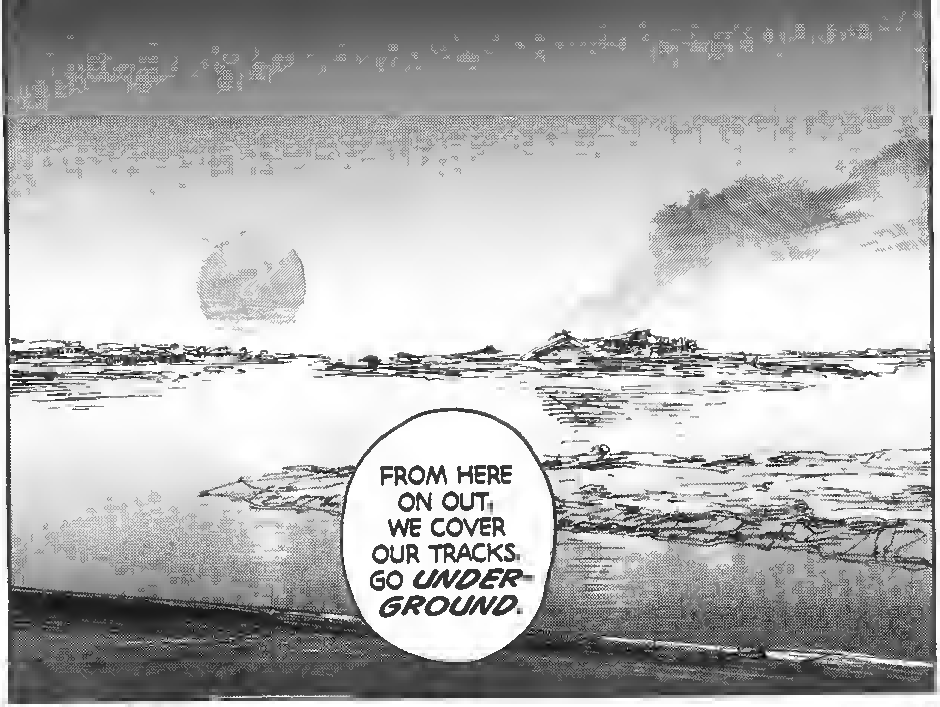
LOOKING BACK, ALL WE REALLY HAD WAS AN IDEAL.
JUST GOOD COMRADES, MY OWN SKILL, AND NOTHING TO LOSE.

THAT'S ALL IT WAS, OUR ITTŌ-RYŪ.

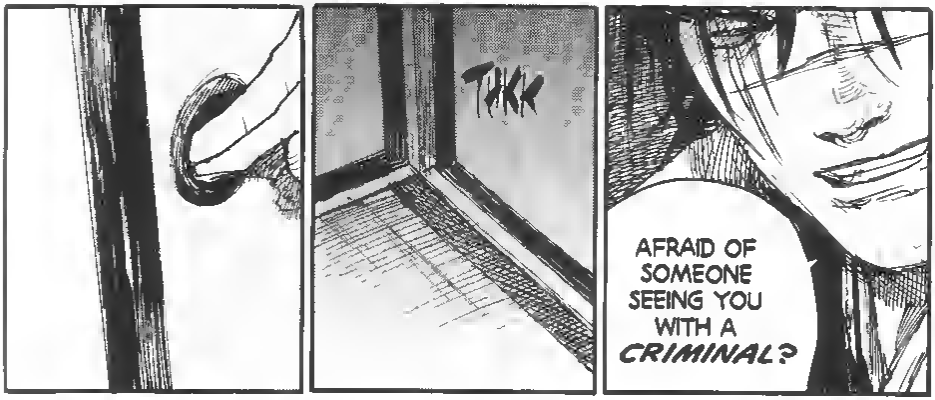
ENOUGH


SIGN:
ITTŌ-RYŪ

SLASH


FROM HERE ON OUT, WE COVER OUR TRACKS. GO *UNDER-GROUND*.

WE *RISE* IN THE *WINTER*.
UNTIL THEN, *ALL* OF YOU... BE WELL.


THKK
AFRAID OF SOMEONE SEEING YOU WITH A CRIMINAL?

WHAT KINDA JOINT YOU RUNNING HERE?
WHAT IS THIS CRAP? YOU INVITE A DUDE OVER AND YOU'RE NOT EVEN SERVING TEA?
HALF PAST THE FOURTH HOUR (11:00 AM), THE COMPOUND OF HABAKI KAGIMURA.

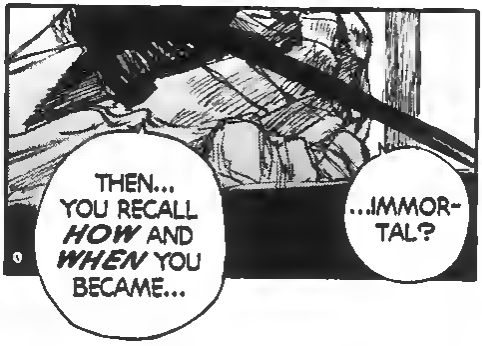
DON'T PUSH IT, YOUNG MAN.

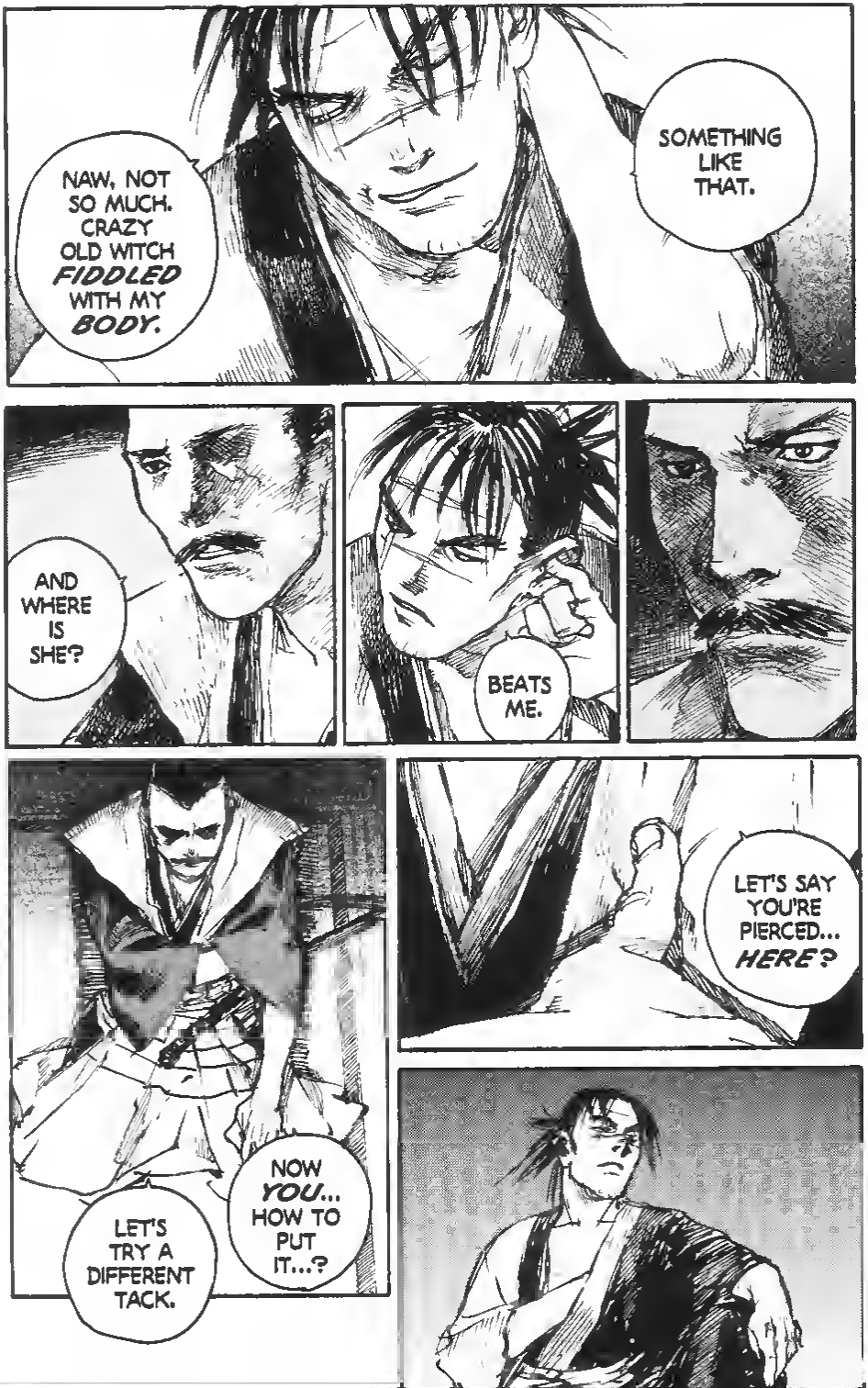
THE HUNDRED YOU KILLED...
...INCLUDED *NINE* OF MY MEN.
...NO SHIT?
SORRY 'BOUT THAT. SO, LIKE...
...YOU CALLED ME HERE TO *BITCH?*
NO. NOT THAT.
I SUMMONED YOU TO *CONFIRM* TWO OR THREE THINGS.
I HEAR THAT YOU'RE...

RUMOR HAS IT.
...IMMORTAL.

WAS THAT...
...BY BIRTH?

HELL, AIN'T NO ONE LIKE THAT.

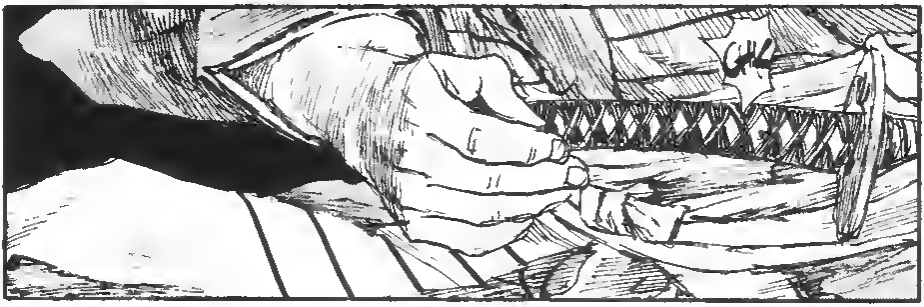

...IMMORTAL?
THEN... YOU RECALL HOW AND WHEN YOU BECAME...


NAW, NOT SO MUCH. CRAZY OLD WITCH *FIDDLED* WITH MY *BODY*.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
AND WHERE IS SHE?
BEATS ME.
LET'S SAY YOU'RE PIERCED... *HERE*?
LET'S TRY A DIFFERENT TACK.
NOW *YOU*... HOW TO PUT IT...?

THERE?
ALL THE FUCKING TIME!
AH! I SEE!
IN THAT CASE, YOUR IMMORTALITY IS PERFECT.
NOPE.
SORRY, PAL, BUT IT AIN'T SO SWEET.
THERE ARE WAYS TO KILL ME. WAYS FOR ME TO DIE.
LOTS.
FOR EXAMPLE?
YOU THINK I'LL TELL YOU, GOAT-FACE?!
IF YOU REALLY WANNA KNOW...

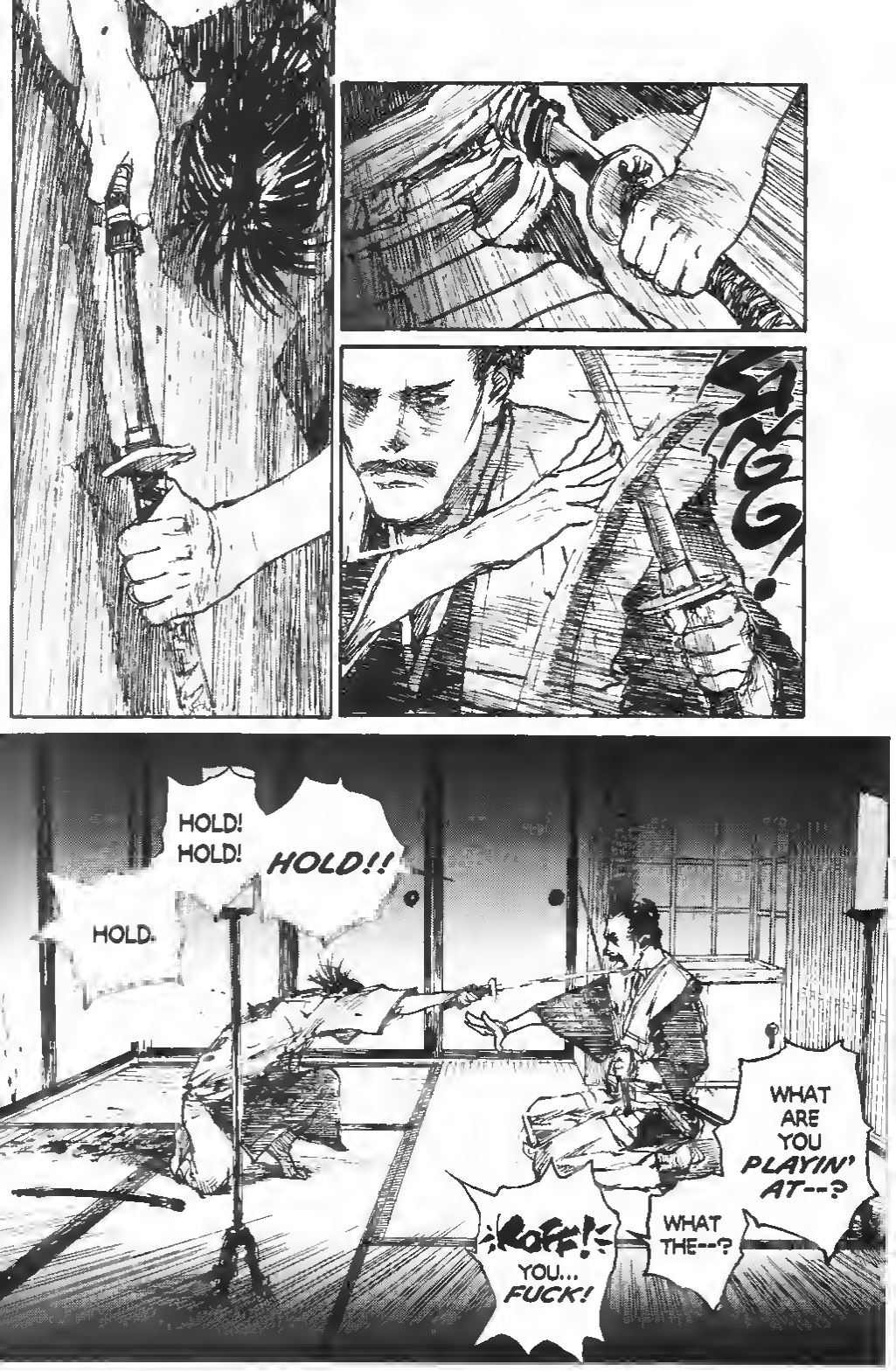
...YOU COULD TRY IT NOW. I'M DOWN WITH THAT.
LIKE, YOU'RE STRONG, RIGHT?
YOU GOT BALDY CRAWLING AROUND FOR YOU.
DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE AFTER...
...BUT I SORTA COUNTED ON A FIGHT WHEN I CAME THROUGH THE GATE.
WELL, GENERAL?
WE CAN SIT ON OUR BUTTS ALL DAY BLABBING, OR--

SHING
THUK


GHZ

AH...
AIN?!

GHZ

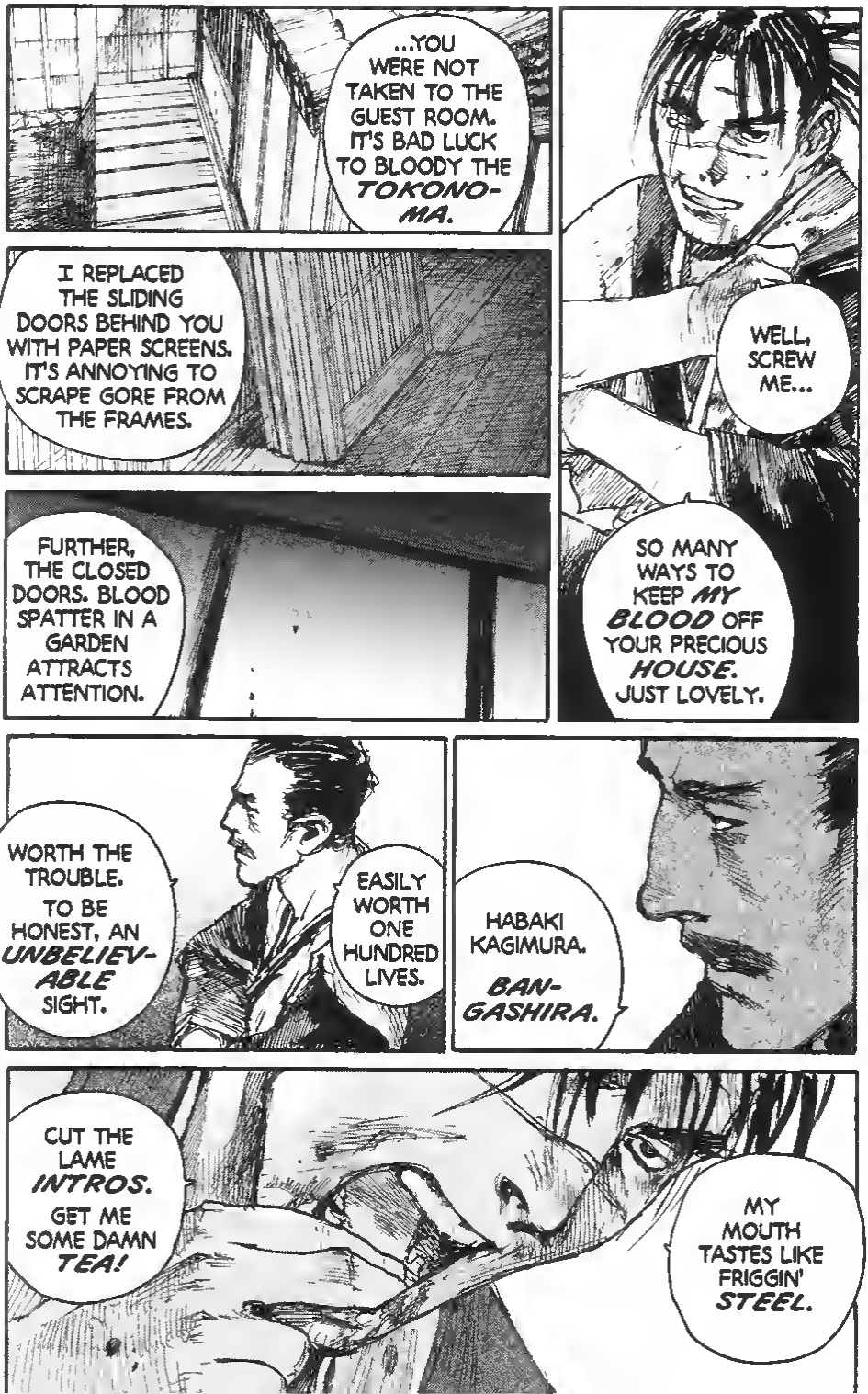

KA-CHING!
HOLD!
HOLD!
HOLD!!
HOLD.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYIN' AT--?
WHAT THE--?
KOFF!
YOU... FUCK!

MANJI! HEAR ME!
I HAVE NO WISH TO FIGHT YOU!
MY WORD!
UNTIL YOUR WOUND CLOSES, I SHALL NOT MOVE!
KOFF!
KOFF!
YOU... FRIGGIN...!
GOFF!
AUFF...
UHRGG!

UUUUF...
URGK!
:KOFF!:
HUF...
UUUUF...
KRRR...
AUK!
HUF...

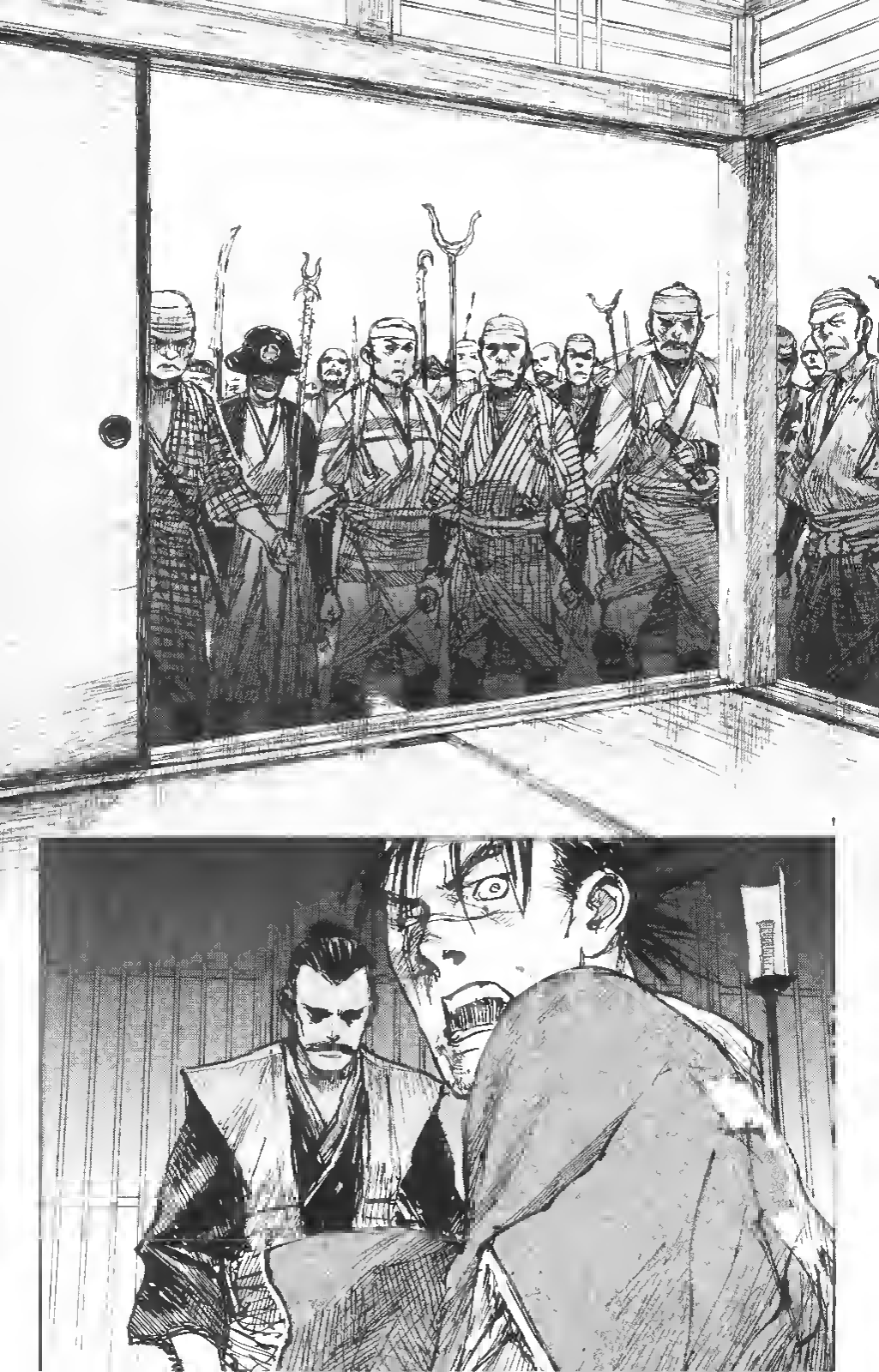
KOFF!
KHOFF!
HARGG!
ptch!
GOOD GOD...
ONE COULD KILL A HUNDRED--
I'M TELLIN' YA, ASSHOLE... I WHACKED MY HUNDRED... IN MY OLD BODY.
AN' ANOTHER THING...
...NOT DYING WHEN YOU'RE HACKED...
...DOESN'T MAKE IT... FUN!
ESPE-CIALLY CHEST HITS. NOW THIS IS PAIN!
WANNA TRY IT?!
NO. I SEE. RELAX.

.....
.....
THAT WAS BAD OF ME.
ACTUALLY, I SUPPOSE I SHOULD CONFESS. FROM THE START, JUST AS YOU INTENDED TO TEST MY SWORD... I INTENDED TO *EXPLORE* YOUR IMMORTALITY.
OBSERVE THE ROOM WITH THIS IN MIND.
FIRST...

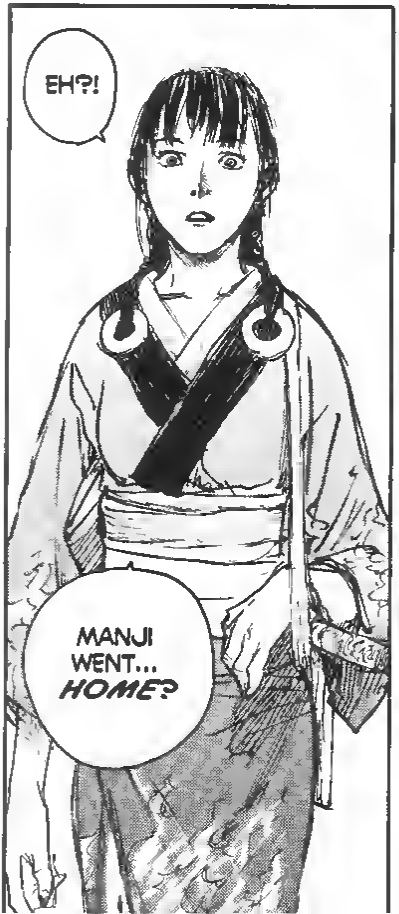

...YOU WERE NOT TAKEN TO THE GUEST ROOM. IT'S BAD LUCK TO BLOODY THE TOKONO-MA.
I REPLACED THE SLIDING DOORS BEHIND YOU WITH PAPER SCREENS. IT'S ANNOYING TO SCRAPE GORE FROM THE FRAMES.
FURTHER, THE CLOSED DOORS. BLOOD SPATTER IN A GARDEN ATTRACTS ATTENTION.
WELL, SCREW ME...
SO MANY WAYS TO KEEP MY BLOOD OFF YOUR PRECIOUS HOUSE. JUST LOVELY.
WORTH THE TROUBLE. TO BE HONEST, AN UNBELIEV-ABLE SIGHT.
EASILY WORTH ONE HUNDRED LIVES.
HABAKI KAGIMURA. BAN-GASHIRA.
CUT THE LAME INTROS. GET ME SOME DAMN TEA!
MY MOUTH TASTES LIKE FRIGGIN' STEEL.

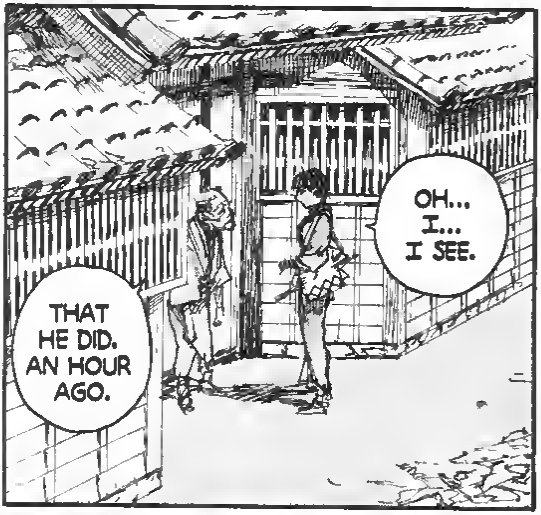
AND SO?! YOU'VE MET THE GUY WITH THE FREAKY BODY.
WHADDAYA WANT HIM TO DO?
HRMM...?
WHAT DO I WANT HIM TO DO?
MM.
NOTHING, REALLY.
AHHN?!
IN TRUTH, NOW THAT I KNOW YOU REALLY ARE IMMORTAL...
...YOUR WORK IS LARGELY DONE.

SHALL I OPEN THE DOORS, SIR?
YES, DO.
THE REEK OF BLOOD IS UNBEAR-ABLE.
SURRK



AND NOW, MY GUEST.
SHALL WE PROCEED WITH THE *FEAST?*


EH?!
MANJI WENT... *HOME?*

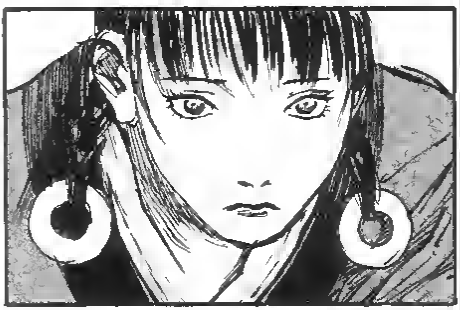

OH... I... I SEE.
THAT HE DID. AN HOUR AGO.

I *BLEW* IT...

HE'S NOT HERE.
BUT... MAYBE IT'S BETTER TO AVOID THIS PLACE?
THE ITTŌ-RYŪ KNOWS ABOUT IT.
SO WHAT NOW?
THE SUN'S SETTING...

MASTER SŌRI'S MOVED, GOD KNOWS WHERE...
A SAFE PLACE.
THAT MANJI KNOWS OF...
SO BE IT...
MUTENICHI-RYŪ DŌJŌ, RIN'S CHILDHOOD HOME.

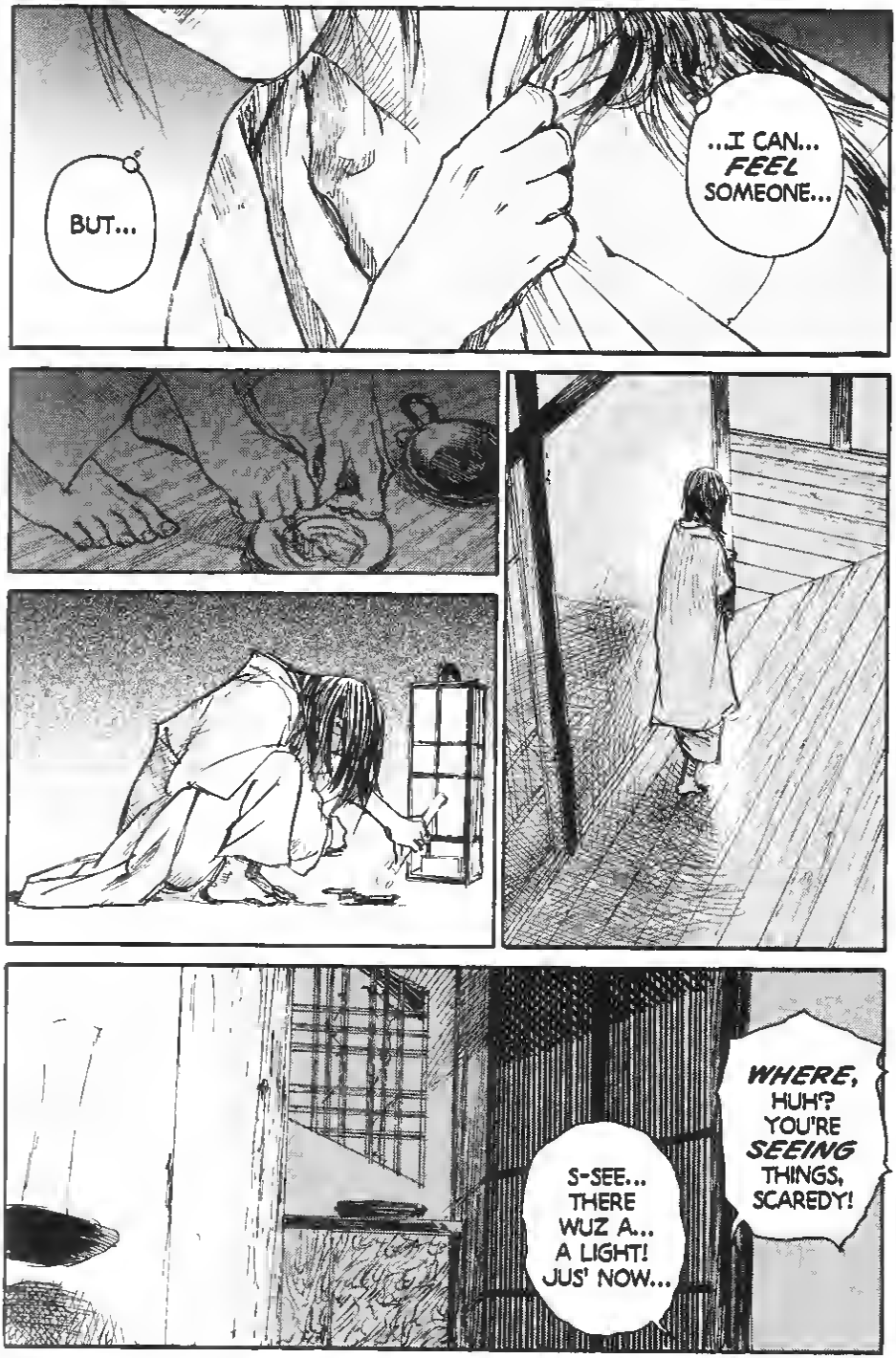
YUCK! SO MUCH *DUST.*



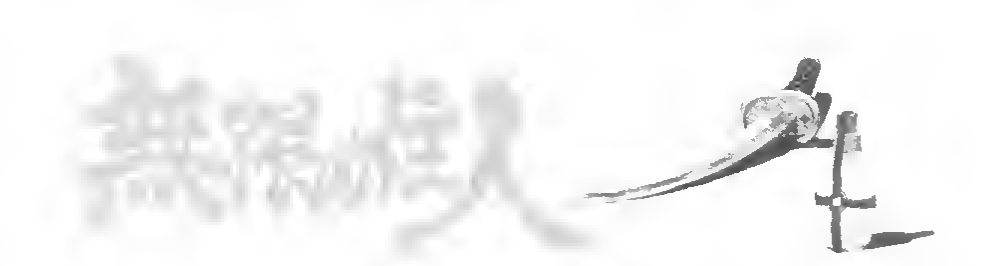
COME TO THINK OF IT... IT HAS BEEN *SIX MONTHS.*

NOTE: I'M SORRY. I'M WAITING AT THE DŌJŌ. -RIN
I LEFT A NOTE, SO IT SHOULD BE OKAY...
...UNLESS SOME ITTŌ-RYŪ THUG READS IT FIRST.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, RIN? WEAK-LING...
MANJI.
PLEASE HURRY HOME.

HE'S NOT BACK YET.


BUT...
..I CAN... FEEL SOMEONE...
S-SEE... THERE WUZ A... A LIGHT! JUS' NOW...
WHERE, HUH? YOU'RE SEEING THINGS, SCAREDY!

THIS ONE'LL OPEN. TRY THE RAIN SHUTTER.
NNGN! NOPE... LOCKED
LIKE, WHEN I WENT TO KOJI'S PLACE...?
I PASSED BY HERE.
I KNOW IT'S EMPTY. NOBODY'S HERE.
A DAY'S SCRUBBING, AND IT'S A PERFECT...
...HIDE-OUT?
TO BE CONTINUED...!



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GLOSSARY

Bakufu: The central government and bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa Shogunate. Originally established in Edo by the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshu: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*.

Mugai-ryu: Criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets, literally "without form."

Mutemichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryu: A sword school.

Tokonoma: An alcove for receiving guests, often used to display flower arrangements and works of art.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

NEXT MONTH:
Cauldron & An Open Pit

October's 48-page issue delivers *two* chapters of Hiroaki Samura's stunning masterpiece! and two new complex characters come to the forefront. As Rin frets over Manji's disappearance, she is surprised by the arrival of two traveling warriors seeking shelter. Meanwhile, Manji finds himself in a very disturbing situation — and the horrific reason behind Kagimura's interest in him becomes clearer!

HORSEPOWER

13 Questions WITH Emily the Strange

Emily the Strange has a posse...she also has a line of cool clothing, a new movie deal with Fox, a line of best-selling books, and now, she's got her very own comic book, coming this August from Dark Horse. We sat down with Emily for a quick game of 13 Questions to learn a little more about her comic and what it's like to be Strange.

DARK HORSE: Emily, why did you want to make a comic book?
EMILY: Comics are weird. I like weird things.

DH: Besides making a comic, what have you been doing on your summer vacation?
E: Spending as much time as possible staying out of the sun.

DH: What is your favorite thing to do when the moon is full?
E: Lately, it's been studying the killing, eating, and mating rituals of the recently discovered *mothra angelica* spider. I just love those eight leggers!

DH: Have you ever thought about running for President?
E: Yeah, I think about running after him to give him a slobbery wet willy and a power packed knuckle sandwich.

DH: What do you feed your kitties? What do they feed you?
E: I treat them to jerky now and then. Nutro brand kitty food and KittyCo Brand are tasty they say. The Posse loves to bring me all kinds of critters (alive and dead) to play with. I don't eat them, but sometimes I use them in an experiment and reanimate them. We all usually become real good friends when they wake up—I said usually!

DH: In the first issue of your comic, you interview the legendary punk band The Damned. How do you know those guys?
E: It was a funny thing—the bassist, Patricia, her kitty is an ancestral relation to my Sabbath. We both were checking out the family trees and bumped into each other around the top of the tree!

DH: What did you do on your thirteenth birthday?
E: I think you'll have to wait and see my movie to find that out.

DH: If you could spend a year traveling around the Earth or a year traveling around in space, which would you choose?
E: I've been lost on earth for a while now, so I think I'd prefer being Lost in Space.

DH: What is your greatest talent?
E: Avoiding answering dumb questions.

DH: Why do you like the colors black and red so much?
E: Why do you keep asking me questions?

DH: What are your favorite pastimes? Do you have any hobbies?
E: I create things. I make my dreams and nightmares come true. I also enjoy doing nothing at all. Listening to nothing sounds really strange. I like to rock.

DH: Do you have a super power?
E: I close my eyes and you disappear!

DH: What's your secretest secret?
E: Like I'm gonna tell you...

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SEPTEMBER 2005

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BIG BLUE
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